

<http://forestpunk.wordpress.com/2014/05/19/heightened-sensitivity-towards-beauty-an-interview-with-derek-piotr-with-an-exclusive-mix/>

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A polish-born musician, who lives in New England, and makes lush, tropical soundscapes and inadvertently sings in Indonesian?

Such are the confusing, and wondrous, times we live in.

Derek Piotr is an electroacoustic composer, sound designer and electronic musician, working with a refined palate of noise, beats, field recordings and digitally manipulated voice, to create dense microverses of sound. He got in touch a few months ago, on the eve of releasing his newest album, [Tempatempat](#), which started a lengthy period of correspondence and brainpicking, culminating in this hardcore, extensive interview, and an exclusive mix Piotr made for Forestpunk; a compendium of trance musicks from all over the world, international funk, noisy pop, and a preview from the new album, which is out now, on [Monotype Records](#).

Piotr proved himself to be a lovely and charming interviewee; a serious musician and composer with a pop heart of gold. He only wants to make something beautiful; to give birth to these exotic worlds that come “burbling out of his chest”.

We actually spoke on Skype on my Birthday, as I was characteristically starving, during a very rare for Portland snowstorm. Somehow, it seemed to bring me closer to the New England world i was talking to Piotr in, and together, it seemed we were inhabiting *Tempatempat*'s lush, tropical wetness. Colorful birds flew overhead, perching on telegraph wires, as we talked on subjects as diverse influences, nature, getting possessed by a Sufi, ADD, M.I.A., ‘noise pop’ and the significance of releasing an album, in a saturated world. Piotr also gave us extensive insight into the making of *Tempatempat*, including detailed technical information, so you producers and musicians, take note. There are secrets here.

Many thanks to Derek Piotr, for taking the time to talk, and for bearing with us, as we get this beast typed up.

So for now, climb into this verdant arbor. Explore the viny trellises of *Tempatempat*, as you listen to the mix.



We spoke to Derek the day after a show in Brooklyn. Funnily enough, our questions disappeared from the audio we were transcribing enough, because we're undead, and our voice doesn't record to tape, so we've had to recreate our questions, to the best of our ability. We got the gist.

Re: the show. and how are you doing?

i played a show last night, so i got a bit greedy and thought i'd take the day and just space out. It was a mix of my four records, with an emphasis on the one coming out, *Tempatempat*. In the autumn, I reworked some of my older material, which are my go to tracks.

Briefly, how would you describe the performance?

In a few sentences, i'm just going to pick a few words: intimate, focused, surprising. Measured. I don't know – the other thing that people seem to want, that i read about, with electronic shows, is engagement with the audience. And I have a couple friends of mine who are in their 50s and 60s, who have come to shows of mine, and one of my friends commented, "Are you going to come out from behind that laptop and sing in front of us?".

My response to her was "How is sitting at a laptop any different than sitting at a piano, or sitting with a guitar?" But, i am very in my own bubble, when i perform, i've always done that. There's just too much going on for me to be looking at the audience, and pointing at them and dancing at them or whatever. I play a lot of shows with the lights off, and people can just like, exist, and let the sound speak for itself. I think with what i do, you're not up there with a new hair do, or new tennis shoes. It's not about you, and there's no real attachment to style, aesthetically, visually. It's more about the sound. So that's what I place a heavy emphasis on. I did bring tour visuals with me, this time, because the photographers were going to be there, but in general it's not about that, for me. I devote a lot of time thinking about how the album is going to look, and what the album title is going to be, and what meanings I can pull out of the album titles. I spend a lot of time doing research for each album, and put that all on my website. That's enough visual stimulation for people, for them to not need more than that.

Do you just play pre-recorded tracks?

It's a little more complicated than that. I put together a base file, in the weeks ahead, and it's as spare as i can make it, and i just play that in garageband, cuz i don't trust Audacity. Just a basic pop backing track. I keep it as spare as possible, then drop tracks into simpler and sampler (in live), and add a bunch of effects, and i also have an ipad on stage, and i'm using my voice. Depending on what i'm playing, i have to EQ, have to bend over the PA and reach the EQ parameters, so with those 5 different layers going on, i think that's enough for me. I think a lot of people still really love to rag on laptop musicians, which i don't really understand. Like, i read a recent interview with Matmos and they're like, still ragging on sample-based

anything – any presets or any drum kits, which i'm not a big fan of big fan of drum machines or synthesizers. I mean, i understand, they're Matmos, they're the sample kings. At the end of the interview, they kind of relent and say, if you're looking for a snare sound and someone coughing, EQed, isn't going to do that for you, i guess use an 808 hit. I think ultimately, for me, i didn't pick electronic music to be edgy, i didn't pick electronic music because i'm a nerd, although i kind of am. I didn't pick electronic music 'cuz i suck at drumming. I came to this method of making music because it affords so much variety. I think people can get caught up in their own strictures, is this a sample? Is this a preset? Is this a synthesizer, or a slowed down yawn to get that bass tone. It doesn't matter. I think my real aim has always been towards some variegated form of beauty, without puffing myself up too much, however you can come to that. It matters, at the end of the day, and nothing else, really. Certain things just don't go together, you can just tell – certain rhythms don't go with certain melodies, and there's that, but that's very, very idiosyncratic, and it's very case-by-case, and I've slowly become interested in drum kits, where I used to be, when I was younger, I wouldn't use sample hits at all, or sample synthesized tones, just sample things and slow them down or speed them up. That's falling away from what I do, because I'm realizing more and more the level of accessibility we have to all these sounds, and you can youtube up anything, and rip the audio. You can have some woman in Indonesia who's only had two views, who's chanting, not that I'm really advocating for sampling random chants, there should be some purity of intent behind that – you shouldn't just be willy-nilly, but we do have a lot of choice now, and I think more people should take advantage of. What the laptop can represent is, there's so much you can do in just one software now. But i think people get really distracted, and engage with music with their eyes, and if there's not three people on stage playing bass and drums and guitars, they're like 'What the fuck did I come here to see?'

We asked about the influence of gamelan, and whether or not Tempatempat is intended as 'just ambient music'?

I think, with all of my records, and I don't do this consciously, but you're making me aware of it now, but I think I subvert what the tone palate is. For instance, I paired bells with radio static on Airing, my second record. Bells are like ancient church music; pure, celestial, sacred things. Radio static is the total sonic opposite, every frequency at once, pagan, distorted, don't know where it's coming from, don't know who's voice that is flickering in, tuning in, very intense, noisy, grating, modern. With Raj, I kind of did the same thing. I took organ pieces I recorded in a cathedral – again, very pure tones, celestial, churchy, ancient, religious, and paired them with surging, grinding noise.

With my earliest recordings, in middle school and high school, I was cutting up Encarta Encyclopedia 95 world music samples. I would re-record them, and then sing over them, and that was my first "on my own" music. In a way, Tempatempat traces back to that. I've always had an affinity for bell tones, and I really, really love gamelan music, but I never really took gamelan as take it or leave it ambient music. At least with the recordings i like to listen to, there's a lot of really brutal, acrobatic pounding going on. To me, some of it feels like a physical exercise for the people who are performing this music. It's like a [beats on desk] they're playing the same drum pattern, and they're reaching this trance state, and that really interested me. Slowly, I started to stretch the running times of some of the tracks, like "Bhadrakali" and "Mandala", into these very hypnotic – I'm very into hypnotic, tone-driven music right now, that's also percussive. There's this one wonderful recording Sublime Frequencies put out, called Pop & Folk Music From Sumatra, I think it was the first disc they ever issued. And there's recordings on there from this group called the Haba Haba group, it's just like, one drum, one gong, and one flute, and one guy sings for 15 minutes. There's just like two tones, and it's just like [hums a melody]. I got really interested in the fact that you only need two tones to hold someone's attention. I think I got away from that really, really quickly, because I do throw a lot of tapestry into what I do, but I tried to do that at least a little bit, hint at, that you just need one pattern, and it can be so engaging. I used to be kind of against that, and tried to overstuff my music, and now I think I am getting to a place, especially with the material that I am working on now, I think it's more apparent that it's just one flute, one drum – that's sort of all you need. Instead of fading into the background, that's something that really holds my attention. So, I don't know, maybe I'm different than most people.

We asked about cultural appropriation, and about the Sublime Frequencies record label.

Well, i think. I think the people at Sublime Frequencies do really, really good work. I think a lot of people think the music on Sublime Frequencies is exotic simply because it is from other cultures. I think a lot of the music that Sublime Frequencies has issued is fairly standard court music, or fairly standard pop music for that region. It just happens to be exoticized because it's not based off of our 12-tone system. I think, I'm a person who really respects possibility, and I find that "Just Intonation", whether it's Harry Partch or Sublime Frequencies, I've really gotten into all of the in-between tones that arise, that aren't in our piano scale. So I never really approached it like I was this curator, and there were all these little geishas on pedestals or something – that's really disgusting to me. But I also don't spend a lot of time thinking that way. I take people on as humans – I don't really see gender, ever. I don't think of things as a "women's issue" or a "men's issue", I just take people on as people. So I don't take people on like "This is an African issue", or "This is a European issue". It never factored in for me.

'Cuz there's a lot of what I consider to be beautiful music, that is from all corners of the world. Right now, I'm really into woodwind music and **Stravinsky**, **Morton Feldman**. I don't think there's one priority over another. I think to try and pair that style of music with a house beat or something would be really tacky, but there's a lot of music that would be really tacky over a house beat. I think as long as you're sensitive.

I will say this. I did a few wordless takes for the album, and I was going to replace them, because I was a little skinny white boy singing gibberish over gamelan... Yuck! But I was looking for a word for my album title, and the word 'ro' means spirit i Indonesian, and I knew it would probably be an Indonesian word, because of all the gamelan. So I transcribed the vocal takes, and they're all legitimate Indonesian, and they all make sense, and they're all more sophisticated lyrics than I ever would have written consciously. So the more literature I read, the most information I gathered, on Muslim and Hindu cultures, the more I'm convinced, and I wouldn't believe it if you told me this yourself, but I was probably possessed by some sort of Sufi. This is all crazy stuff, but it had reaffirmed the work that I had done and it made me feel a little more validated about why I had chosen this particular region to focus on, with this album. Because, obviously, it could be perceived as tacky, but for the privileged white kids that are listening to my music in America and Europe, primarily, they are living in a life without consequences anyway, so it doesn't matter. I would be curious to play in Jakarta, and see if that would go over or not. It's something that I do think about, but doesn't matter, at this stage. I feel like I got some kind of weird outside spiritual validation, to just kind of be with it, so I'm not too worried about "collecting cultures", or something.

Describe your music for anyone who hasn't heard it.

Whenever I'm in public and asked what I do, I always turn helplessly to whoever is with me, because I'm really bad at explaining my music. I was trying to describe it to the photographer last night, before we started, and my friends showed up early. I told them I made "Noise Pop", and my friends were like, 'it's just organized noise.

Are you crazy? Pop angle? What?" I feel like what I do isn't **Kevin Drumm**, it isn't **Merzbow**. It's not NOISE. I think there's always an element of accessibility there. Like I said earlier, I'm just aiming for what's beautiful. I don't really know how to explain it, other than that. I use my voice, I use samples. There's elements of composition. I'm a producer. It's hard to talk about what it sounds like, I think. It's easier to talk about what my intentions are. But I do think I make a form of Noise Pop, whether or not my friends agree [we agree, for what it's worth - fp]

Noise vs. pop?

Well, it's hard because what do you do when you idolize **Kit Clayton** and **St. Vincent**? It's funny. When I started, as I said, it was really loop-based, weird-ass pop songs, kind of like **Solex** for the digital age, or something. Then I got into **AGF**'s music, and she is married to **Vladislav Delay**, who also records as **Luomo**. He is a pretty well-respected Dark Ambient producer and dub producer. I found her music on Slseek 6 or 7 years ago, when I put my music up on Last.fm. I just downloaded her first album – I didn't

know anything about her work, that just happened to be the album that I downloaded, and it floored me. It's just a collection of really intricate, nuanced white noise, fragments of rhythm, fragments of voice, really disgusting, beautiful noise and electronics, broken beats. I'd been experimenting with breaking my voice up anyway, mostly because I couldn't get a vocal take that I was happy with, when I was younger. I was using a shitty mic, so I would just amplify the static, out of frustration, and cut my voice up. Hearing what she did really fleshed it out for me, and made me feel like there was a way to give that direction. And to this day, my favorite sound is the sound of a human voice, stuttering and cut-up – there's some potency there that's really interesting. There's been no way to do this, until the last 20 years of recorded audio. There was no way to produce that sound, that stuttered, skipping of the human voice, that I use all the time in my work. There was no... if something was scratched on vinyl, it was softer than that, and if something got back-masked with tape, or you sped the tape up, there was a much different vibe. To be able to cut samples of the human voice that small, with a hard cut each time, is very new, and it's very exciting to me, and I really haven't worked out psychologically why. So like I was saying, that really gave me direction. So I reached out to her, at one point (AGF), and she offered to produce part of my first record, and she's really been a big inspiration to me. I think what she does is accessible, but it's also very dry, and very noisy, but is somehow still very accessible. I got very interested in why was a slowed down breath the perfect intro to a track, that sounds so warm, although it's very, very cold. I'm just very interested in that angle, I guess. I do think, like it or not, that I'm swimming in obscurity right now, but my goal is to be somebody like **M.I.A.** or something, who is someone who makes very inaccessible, noisy music, but has this platform where people who pay attention to her. There's a lot of universality and flow there, and she is able to communicate with a lot of people. I think that's so important. So I do consciously go for... I could go the serious Kevin Drumm route, and just do 7" s of 12-minute noise pieces, but that doesn't interest me. And that's not something I listen to on a daily basis. You just have to go with what excites you.

You just have to go with what excites you.

What was the impetus behind Tempatempat?

I think when I made *Raj*, I realized I had made a breakthrough, in a sense. I had begun Tempatempat in July 2012, so before *Raj* was even released. Originally I was going to make an album that was supposed to be, the formula would be some sort of white noise, there would be some kind of ambient hiss, like Skype is probably making in the background right now, paired with sub-beats, no high-hats, just really basic, with flickers of noise here and there. I did do a couple of tracks that followed that formula, but very quickly realized that wasn't the angle that I wanted to go for, and the only track that remains from those sessions is "Terminal", which is the first track I wrote for the record, and it still has that formula, that white hiss and sub-beats. Further along the road, like I said *Raj* was such a breakthrough for me, that the way I was playing with beats became more open and more sophisticated, because naturally I think you get better at what you do, each time you do it. I think, funnily enough, with each album that you do, you reach a new plateau or level. It just happens every time, it's this weird rule. So, originally, the second stage of my envisioning for this record was like a studio, almost like an indie chamber album, pathetically enough. I was inspired by stuff I had been listening to in high school, stuff like **Incubus'** *Crow Left Of The Murder*, or **Bright Eyes'** *Digital Ash In A Digital Urn*, so I went back to all these records. Not so much for the content, emotionally, but more for the studio noises, really subtle production things, that are really deep, and it just really interested me.

Those are both of those respective bands black sheep albums, full of bizarre electronics. I wanted to sort of capture that. I wanted to make a more accessible record than *Raj*, because I tend to pendulum. I said this in a recent interview, *Agora* was very spicy, digital, rough where *Airing* was kind of neoclassical and smoother, *Raj* was again kind of grating and spiky, and I knew this time around that I wanted to be more open, and more accessible. The other challenge that I had for myself was that I wanted to use voice in a way that wasn't fragmentary, because I thought I had worked with the voice as a texture for so long, it was time to carry a track primarily in a pop sense. So I did use words on 80% of the record, when before I was using them on like 20%. *Raj* has like 20 words total, I counted, and this one probably has, it's way more

than that. And then the other components just came, and it turned into this journey, and I knew that it was very green, and it was very summery, and it was very lush, and that's what the cover art reflects. The title, depending on how you break it up, in Indonesian, you get Tempe Tempat, which is '4th place', or you have Tempet Empat, which is 'forging place', I may have those backwards. It just seemed in my mind to be this really lush, more relaxed sister of Raj, somehow. Every album that I've ever done, at the end of the day, when I'm done working on it, there's a whole microverse, there. It's always been how I've worked, I don't know why. That's why I always put locations on the covers of my sleeves. I spend a lot of time cutting up audio, and it's not necessarily because I want to. I feel very glued to coaxing this cathedral out of my chest. I feel like every time i make an album, that there's this world that is just sort of burbling up, and I don't ever know where it's taking me, until the final hour, and then the album title comes, and the visuals, and it all glues itself together, and I just have to sit there and say, 'Wow! I birthed that.' Not in a self-aggrandizing way, but more like it's my duty to get these internal structures out, and I have no idea why, but it's really been my mission, these last 5 years, to pay attention to that.

What is your methodology?

Are you asking track by track, or album by album? Well, it's funny, cuz like I say, the concept of my albums shift drastically from the time I'm done from the time I've started. Like I said with Tempatempat, first there was that bare formula, the weird chamber indie music, and then it turned into Indonesian noise pop or something. But track by track is maybe easier to talk about, although it's just as unpredictable. I generally sit and generate tones and textures, chop my voice and edit things, and sometimes I only end up with 10 seconds of audio, and I'll put that in a folder, and I have these chronologically dated on my desktop, by month and by year. And then, out of the blue, I'll sit down and there will be this huge flow going on, to get like a beat. Most of my music is beat driven, so I know there's a kind of carriage there, and it'll kind of appear. I'll have a rhythm carriage in front of me, and it'll happen really, really quickly, and then I can kind of dip back in. Sometimes it'll happen right off the bat, sounds I choose fit perfectly, or there's a lot of searching, a lot of importing and deleting, figuring out what the pairing is. Often it's two things you never would have thought go together that go together. It's a persistent helter-skelterness, is probably the best way to explain.

How do you know when an album is finished?

Well, I think, like it or not, if you do something within a period of time, it connects itself in subconscious, subliminal ways. Like I said, each time you start a new album, you're at a different tier, even if you've made tracks in between, even if they don't make the album. You feel like you've advanced or moved or grown somehow, at least for me, and when you've got this album in mind, it's almost like your in a trance or something, and you can't quite control the quality of the work or the level you're going to be. It just presents itself. I have a friend who I've been helping to produce. I've been helping him for 5 years now, and he's just kind of overworked all of his tracks, and it's so funny, 'cuz now he's stripping them all down, and doing vocal takes again, because he wants to get a looser feeling, after tightening them up. It's just so funny to watch that. I mean, everyone's entitled to make the work that they feel that they should make, but I've always believed in not forcing things, and just letting things come, which is why I've put together so many records in such a short amount of time, because I just know when the universe has tied itself up in a bundle, and I can make a new bundle. It's not conscious. It's not like I'm like 'Wait a minute! Why doesn't the bass hit harder?' It is what it is, and there is an evolution that will occur. I just trust that, and I go with it, because the next time around, you're even more evolved. And the next time. And the next time.

What gear do you use?

I started on Audacity in 2006, and I still use that program a lot. I really don't like the way that Ableton lays things out for you, it's very obscured when you're doing fades. Because, growing up with Audacity, you can see it when something fades. With Ableton, you draw automation in. I'm very visual, with what I do with music, so when I'm working, I can kind of see if something is too loud. And Ableton, I feel like there's a lot of guesswork there, whether something is too loud. This is just what I'm used to. Ableton is

obviously a lot more powerful. I tend to arrange in Audacity, though. And then I have a Shure microphone that I sing in to, that plugs into my computer with an adaptor, so it's pretty barebones. I'm not much one for distractions. I tend to close each tab as I open it, with web browsing. I don't have a ton of applications on my dock, that's how I've always been. I've been very visually simplified.

Do you go anywhere, for engineering or production? How much of your music is based on samples?

Most of what I do, I record myself, and it seems to be, more and more with each album. I mean, I have a huge love of ripping YouTube audio, so sometimes a snippet of YouTube audio from somewhere sneaks in, or friends send me sounds a lot, and I used to be a little bit more open about that. Someone would send me snippets of them playing oboe, and I'd slow it way down, and it was the perfect bassline. Or someone would be like, "O, I just recorded the pine trees outside of my house." And then I kind of had a think, a few months ago, and it's been more conscious that I record it all myself. I have a field recorder. And if I'm kind of lacking in inspiration, I'll turn on my Kaoscillator, or my iPad, or my tape machine, or my record player, and I'll sample from various... at the end of the day, we're just fucking around with formats, we're just getting a sound that excites us. I think, for me, sometimes you've just got to shake yourself out of being on the computer, and you've just to get a different recorder, or something. Mostly, thought, it's my recordings, it's not really sample based, like **Gold Panda** or something, it's much more like me.

Do you use a lot of programs?

Kind of. Not that many. Maybe half a dozen or so, and a variety of mics that I use. And like I said, I'm getting more into drum kits on Ableton, and completely fucking them up with various distortion effects. I'm really into making things unrecognizable, like I started this new project that uses a lot of woodwinds, so I've been using synth woodwinds, and then distorting them, to make them sound real, but obscured. You know what I mean? So there's a lot of studio trickery that I kind of play with.

Beat driven vs. ambient?

Yeah, I just answered this question in the last interview that I did. It's something that I do think a lot about, and I wanted to make it especially evident on *Tempatempat*, so hopefully people are picking up on that. AGF is kind of the root. Inspiration, for me, sonically I mean. She's very abstract, and she does the mulched up freetime thing really well, and I was always aiming for that, for a long, long time. But I really love beats. I really love simple, unfussy, unsyncopated, like 2/2 beats, like I was saying earlier, one drum, one flute. I'm really into this really powerful repetitiveness, and I think for the mix that I made you, there's a lot of that for the tracks that I chose. There's a lot of chants, with clapping, and there's that possession song, with all the women chattering. There's one rhythm, two tones, one melody, and I just find that really wonderful. Cuz that's all that you need. I really have a great love for things with no time signature whatsoever, but I'm really into hypnotic rhythms, there's something really pagan about it.

"there's something really pagan about it"

What were some memorable moments, recording *Tempatempat* ?

Well, finding out I was singing in Indonesian was a huge one. I was running around and telling everybody about it, I was sending them the google translate transcription and freaking out. Memories, though, aside from that. I made most of it in Audacity, and I would say 35% of it I made in Ableton. So when I started making some of it in Ableton, I started dumping vocal takes in, started looking at all the parts and pieces, and started re-EQing, and then I started to put reverb on my voice, which I've never done before. I've always been really fond of dry vocals. I didn't have Ableton on this computer, but then I finally got Live 9, it seemed a little bit better than what I'd previously experienced, and I was into it. And when you have that new toy syndrome, you get kind of goofy, and you go overboard. So maybe a good memory I have is 2 or 3 months ago, I was like "Fuck that. No reverb anywhere on this album." So the whole day I sat down, and took the reverb off of everything.

I woke up one day in the summer, and I had two very distinct visions, that just kept striking me for the album, because it was mostly done, at that point, but I had like two pieces that came into my head really strongly. It was like a command. Like I said, I don't always love sitting down and hacking away, but sometimes it's like mind control or something. So I had to call my friend up, and he had to come over and record snare for me, and I put snare on the outro of "Terminal". That was funny, because it was like a spiritual request, and it wasn't really like an aesthetic choice, it was like "You need snare. Here. Now." So that was interesting. I feel like there was a lot of guided creation on this album. Something was pushing me along, which was kind of fascinating.

Inspiration? Intuition?

Well, I consider myself fairly intuitive, and I do have a lot of synchronized moments with people. Or things. Or events. I'm definitely open to that. It's just weird to have that higher power come through. It's definitely something I'm aware of, but it's funny to see it in action. I think the more you open your psyche to things like that, the more they will reveal themselves. But it doesn't really surprise me. It's more like chuckling at it.

My own little Okkultestimmen.

You were born in Poland, but raised in America? How do you think that affected you? Do you feel connected to Europe?

I was super young. I was actually adopted. I was back in Europe, God, 7 years ago now. I haven't been back since. A lot of my friends are from Europe, and I spend a lot of my time in liason with people from Europe. I get a lot of press from Europe. My partner and I are saving up right now to build a house of our own, because we don't want to have to pay for an apartment that we don't own. That's just our own philosophy. I'm living with my parents right now, but it's in our very own woods, in our very, very quiet town. I don't really feel like I'm in Mom's basement or something. I have a really nice setup, and so does my partner, so we're just kind of doing it, to do it right. But we probably will move to Europe, but who knows? It's something I feel very, very close to, but I also don't feel like I have to get on a plane to feel that closeness, if that makes sense.

You perform in cities, but your music is very natural. Do you live close to nature? Does nature play a part in what you make?

Yeah, it's very, very close to nature. Yeah, no, nature is something I was really, really into, as a kid. I was always outside, picking slugs up, sitting in the riverbed, catching spiders, putting spiders in a box so they'd eat each other. Catching toe biters and frogs in the pond, running around with a butterfly net. When the Harry Potter craze took over, I cut down a tree and made my own wand, whittled it down and sanded it, and teac oiled it. I've always had a very nature approach to everything. Every phase of my life, as a kid, I was always very into nature. I can remember having a lapis lazuli stone, that is still somewhere, and as a kid, I would read about where it was mined from. I was very conscious of the Earth. But I'm a Taurus, so that's an Earth sign, so maybe that's some way of explaining it. And then I moved to Brooklyn for a year, and that sucked, and I just didn't want that anymore. I just realized that was the wrong place for me; there was almost no nature, and it was all concrete. We had a park, but what is that? So when I came home, I sort of reawakened, or reaffirmed, this connection that I have, to being on the Earth, and walking, and nature, and being among trees and things. So it's something I think a lot about, and if I had to classify Tempatempat as my nature record. Because there's a lot of focus on the actual world in it, for sure.

Organic vs. electronic?

I can only listen to **Alva Noto** or **Ryuichi Sakamoto** or something before I'm kind of like, "umm...". It's too harsh and digital for me. And I can only listen to Joni Mitchell and Pete Seeger [rip] for so long, because it's like, "o, it's so flower power!". I think if you put them together, though, a lot of electroacoustic

music does this, there's a level of intensity, but it's not too harsh and digital, and there's a level of beauty and human softness, but it's not so vanilla. It's like I'm stopping at nothing to get the perfect mood, or the perfect sound, if it even exists. I'm probably going to spend my whole life chasing that. The laptop is such a great shortcut to that world.

“it's like I'm stopping at nothing to get the perfect mood, or the perfect sound. I'm probably going to spend my whole life chasing that.”

The significance of releasing an album, in such busy times?

We're living in such ADD times, and even major releases fade really quickly. Matangi (from M.I.A.) faded almost immediately, so did The Knife's album. So do Death Grips. Things are really like tidal wave surges on Pitchfork for a week, and then they're GONE for months, and then they come back. It's not like there's this longstanding interest in something, anymore. I remember there was this ridiculous press buildup for the new The Knife record, and then it was like it was out, and they were on top for a week, and then it was gone. We're so ADD now. It just doesn't make sense to me to release loose tracks on SoundCloud, and be like, “This is my shit,” or whatever. And, also, like I said before, I build complete worlds, and it's not my choice, they just kind of emerge. The best way I can think to tie them together is with a 3000 x 3000 square photo, with the album cover, and that's the window into this world, and it's a tracklist that I spend a lot of time sequencing, and figuring out the best possible combination. You know, it's like you've got this universe, it's not like you're going to just slice it up and put it on a plate and ‘See you later’. You want to send it out as completely as possible. I think an album is a great way to do that.

Does classical music have an influence on what you do, at all?

Well, there was a lot of percussive, or austere, classical music. **Stravinsky** is really like, some of his stuff is really bone-snapping, some of it is really fierce. Or, you know, **Wagner** is pretty crazy. **Morton Feldman** I love a lot, and he's very droney and trippy. I went to Columbia for a bit, so I was fed music theory, and I think that kind of carries over. There's a lot of classical music that has great heart to it almost does beats, and he's flirted with remix albums with contemporary musicians. I think I don't see classical music as being different from the classical gamelan court music that Sublime Frequencies puts out, from pop music. Regardless of genre, as long as someone is expressing a heightened sensitivity towards beauty in their music, which is what I believe music is be, and it's not meant to be a fashion statement, and it's not meant to be a drug endorsement, and it's not meant to be a festival excuse. It's not meant to be a ringtone. I think music, at it's core, is supposed to be a beautiful expression of those interior structures we all have. So it doesn't matter so much to me if it's classical, or world, i hate that term, but pop, beat, noise. I'm just looking for the things that are interesting. But I interned with **Meredith Monk**, and I love **John Cage's** work, but I always thought of them as being more, not folk musicians, per se, but more like... I mean, I think, there's just a curiosity there. They're working with an aesthetic, but it's just an aesthetic that calls to them, that just happens to be classical. Obviously, there are a lot of composers, and they sit down, and they want to be composers, and that's there thing. But, you know, **Nico Muhly** just wrote a **Beyonce** review; it's all kind of interwoven.

On using more lyrics?

Like I said, it was kind of a command to myself, to try and... I was like, “Come on, Derek, you've used your voice this long, why don't you just use your voice, no crazy effects, no splicing. Just sing a pop song. I think the way to carry an interest in that is to use words, because they need something to latch on to. I also need something, as a performer, to latch on to, a signpost to go back to, and it's not all [wordless moaning]. You won't be able to find your place in that. And I don't hate words, I actually co-ran a poetry group for the last 4 years, before finally stepping off, and I've written hundreds and hundreds of poems. I don't really intersect my poems and my music too much, they often slip into lyrics a little bit. For instance, “Sand Defacing All Surfaces” was a line from a poem I'd written. They do inform each other, but they're kind of separate, for me. Like I said, wordlessness is neat. I try and give people simultaneously as much or as little

as possible, in the hope that they will come away, feeling fulfilled. It's not minimalism for minimalism's sake, but it's like 'Let's not use every trick in the book'. Like, I really don't like **Iamamiwhoami**, that weird YouTube phenomenon girl, because I feel like she uses every trick in the book, like a forcibly memorable chorus, and good synth lines, and a good hard beat, and a lot of reverb, and flashy videos, and it's just over the top. I don't think people need that much to be satisfied. It just bores me. I think of the old days, when there were only like 2 layers of sound, and it's like "Do you really need that much?"

How do you hope your music is received?

While I hope for my music to be universal, at the end of the day, I don't really give a fuck if people listen or not. I just had a feeling that I committed to recording, and I feel justified in that, and I don't need external praise. I'm actually shocked at the amount of reception and praise my albums have gotten. I never expected that. So it's been fun to keep that flow going, but at the end of the day, that's not what matters to me.

Can you tell us about the mix you made?

It's a lot of stuff I've been really loving lately, and I also tried to place an emphasis on repetition, so I think it opens with "Medua", which is a wonderful Bollywood song that I really love, and there's this YouTube recording I ripped of this woman, **Kumiko Shuto**, playing the biwa. It has a plectrum, it's like a traditional Japanese instrument. I can't tell, but she must be really, really West in Japan, because it almost sounds like a raga, parts of it, almost sounds like a sitar. And that was another one with just two elements, the biwa and the voice. There's one noise introduced at a time. That was an interesting, 'Why can't my music be that simple?' And then there are those two repetitive pieces, the chant and the dance of possession, and I think M.I.A., who I really love, and that Mind Dynamics track, and a few of mine, and that **Colleen** track that uses gamelan. That Colleen record was mastered by the same guy who mastered Tempatempat.

[Tempatempat](#) is out now on [Monotype Records](#).

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